Unusual concentration of Red-billed Buffalo Weaver *Bubalornis niger* nests on pylons in northern Namibia

Grzegorz Kopij

Concentration inhabituelle de nids de l'Alecto à bec rouge *Bubalornis niger* sur des pylônes au nord de la Namibie. En mars 2011, presque chaque pylône d'électricité (n = environ 4.200) le long de la route d'Ondangwa à Katima Mulilo, au nord de la Namibie, supportait des nids de l'Alecto à bec rouge *Bubalornis niger*. Les pylônes se trouvent à une distance de 300 m les uns des autres. Généralement chaque pylône ne supportait que quelques nids, mais certains en avaient de sept à 12. En avril 2013, de nombreux pylônes n'avaient pas de nids du tout. La pluviosité au nord de la Namibie était très élevée en 2011, mais basse en 2013. Ceci pourrait indiquer que l'Alecto à bec rouge préfère nicher sur des pylônes pendant des saisons à forte pluviosité. Placer les nids en hauteur sur des constructions métalliques pourrait également limiter la prédation.

Red-billed Buffalo Weaver *Bubalornis niger*, a common resident in southern and eastern Africa, constructs large-chambered nests of thorny sticks on trees and man-made structures such as windmills and pylons (Vernon & Dean 2005). There are apparently some regional variations in nest-site selection. For example, in Limpopo Province, South Africa, nests are frequently constructed in trees beside roads (Vernon & Dean 2005), whilst in the Omusati and Oshana regions, Namibia, they are usually in palms *Hyphaene petersiana* (pers. obs.).

In northern Namibia, a high-voltage powerline follows the Ondangwa–Rundu (1,148 km) and Rundu–Andara (*c.*200 km) roads. The line runs mostly through Kalahari Sandveld (Mendelsohn *et al.* 2009), i.e. north-eastern Kalahari Woodland (*c.*1,000 km) and Karstveld (*c.*300 km); between Rundu and Andara it follows the Okavango River valley.

In March 2011, I found that almost every pylon (n = *c.*4,200, at 300 m-intervals) held Red-billed Buffalo Weaver nests (Figs. 1–2). All of the pylons that were visible from the car while travelling between Ondangwa and Katima Mulilo were checked. There were usually just a few nests on each pylon, but some held as many as 7–12 nests. No raptors were seen, although they are known to site their nests on those belonging to buffalo weavers (Vernon & Dean 2005). However, the breeding season of most raptors was already finished.

Brown & Lawson (1989) also found Red-billed Buffalo Weaver to be the commonest bird species nesting on electricity pylons in southern and central Namibia, with a mean 4.9 nests per

Figures 1–2. Red-billed Buffalo Weaver *Bubalornis niger* nests on pylons, northern Namibia, March 2011 (Grzegorz Kopij)

Nids de l'Alecto à bec rouge *Bubalornis niger* sur des pylônes, Namibie du nord, mars 2011 (Grzegorz Kopij)

ten pylons. Unfortunately, the percentage of pylons occupied by buffalo weaver nests in those regions is not given, but it was most probably much lower than in northern Namibia, and lower by an order of magnitude than in southern Namibia. It appears that the number of buffalo weaver nests on pylons in Namibia is positively correlated with rainfall, while the reverse is true of raptors (Brown & Lawson 1989).

In most bird species, the main factors influencing nest-site preference are predation, food resources and nest-site availability. Since the two latter factors are not limiting in Kalahari Woodland, it appears that only predation plays a role. Many snakes and viverids (Carnivora: Viveridae) occur in this area, and these may prey heavily on the large and conspicuous buffalo weaver nests in trees. Placing nests high above the ground on metal constructions may prevent predator access. Nests on pylons probably do not persist longer than those in trees. While travelling the same road in April 2013, I observed that many pylons were devoid of Red-billed Buffalo Weaver nests. Rainfall in northern Namibia was very high in 2011, but was low in 2013. This suggests that Red-billed Buffalo Weavers prefer pylons for nesting in very wet seasons.

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First documented record of Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata* for Libya

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Première mention documentée du Gobemouche à demi-collier *Ficedula semitorquata* pour la Libye. Un mâle adulte du Gobemouche à demi-collier *Ficedula semitorquata* a été photographié le 31 mars 2010 à Sebkhet Hasila, sur la côte libyenne à environ 90 km à l'est de Sirte. Deux observations précédentes de mâles ont été signalées à deux sites différents entre Ajdabiya et Benghazi, les 29 mars et 1 avril 2006. L'observation présentée ici est toutefois la première donnée documentée pour le pays de ce migrateur paléarctique.

During a field trip to the north-central coastal wetlands of Libya on 31 March 2010, a black-and-white *Ficedula* flycatcher was seen to land on a low sandstone hill, near the beach north of Sebkhet Hasila (31°24'45"N 17°26'65"E), *c.*90 km east of Sirte. When it moved between shrubs <10 m from us, we were able to photograph it and notice the incomplete white collar, small white forehead patch and white outer tail feathers (Figs. 1–2). These features suggested the bird was an adult male Semi-collared Flycatcher *F. semitorquata* in breeding plumage. Adult male Collared Flycatcher *F. albicollis* in breeding plumage has an all-white collar, a large white